

HOUSING SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

Thursday, 6 February 2025
6.00 pm
**Committee Rooms 1 and 2,
City Hall, Beaumont Fee,
Lincoln, LN1 1DD**

Membership:	Councillors Gary Hewson (Chair), Pat Vaughan (Vice-Chair), Alan Briggs, Liz Bushell, Natasha Chapman and Loraine Woolley
Substitute member(s):	Councillors Adrianna McNulty and Emily Wood
Lincoln Tenants Panel member(s):	Mick Barber (Chair of LTP), Caroline Coyle-Fox (Vice Chair of LTP), Mike Asher (Member of LTP), Sean Newton (Member of LTP) and Debbie Rousseau (Member of LTP)
Officers attending:	Jordan Allmond, Laura Brown, Paula Burton, Democratic Services, Matthew Hillman, Michelle Hoyles, Daren Turner and Marianne Upton

A G E N D A

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Please note that, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, when declaring interests members must disclose the existence and nature of the interest, and whether it is a disclosable pecuniary interest (DPI) or personal and/or pecuniary.	
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Present:	Councillor Gary Hewson (<i>in the Chair</i>)
Councillors:	Alan Briggs, Liz Bushell, Emily Wood and Loraine Woolley
Independent Person(s):	Mick Barber, Caroline Coyle-Fox, Sean Newton and Debbie Rousseau
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor Pat Vaughan, Councillor Natasha Chapman and Mike Asher

36. Confirmation of Minutes - 31 October 2024

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2024 be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a true record.

37. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

38. Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 2 -2024/25

Michelle Hoyles, Housing Strategy Manager:

- a) presented Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee with a report on performance indicators for the Directorate of Housing and Investment (DHI) for Quarter 2 of 2024/25 (July – September) which covered those measures related to the Council's responsibility as a landlord
- b) reported that Lincoln Tenant's Panel had been consulted about this report and had confirmed they had no comments
- c) added that regular monitoring of the Council's performance was a key component of the Local Performance Management Framework and supported its ongoing commitment to continuous improvement of Council services
- d) confirmed that there were a total of thirty-three performance indicators monitored by DHI; an overview of performance for the second quarter of 2024/25, against such indicators was attached at Appendix A to the report
- e) explained that the template for Appendix A included performance 'direction of travel' information to aid interpretation of how performance fluctuated between quarterly reporting periods; benchmarking comparisons would be provided annually at each fourth quarter
- f) reported that during the second quarter of 2024/25, 15 performance measures had met or exceeded their agreed target, four had performed close to target and six had performed below target, the remaining measures were volumetric
- g) highlighted that of the 6 measures performing below target, one was a corporate measure related to call handling in the customer contact centre; this measure 'CS3' related to all calls received by the contact centre, and

therefore included data not linked to Housing services, and was also reported to Performance Scrutiny Committee

- h) confirmed that further, detailed information on the areas highlighted was provided within the report
- i) invited comments and questions from Members of the Committee.

Members discussed the content of the report, commented, asked questions and received relevant responses from officers as follows:

Question: Why were measures for voids still showing as red, although there was now a designated team concentrating on rent collections?

Response: This was down to a loss of rent due to the properties being void for a longer period than expected, rather than a duty of the rent collection team.

Question: The average re-let time in calendar days for all dwellings including major works performed at 48.79 days in quarter 1 and 50.28 days in quarter 2. It was quoted that there were several factors that could influence void re-let times, often influenced by external factors outside of the Council's control. Which internal teams worked to re-let voids as quickly as possible?

Response: The Housing Solutions, Voids Support , Housing Repair Service Support teams, followed by tenancy support were responsible for this area. External factors outside of the Council's control, for example, could be the scene of a crime cordoned off by the police, or high levels of asbestos on site preventing access to the property in a timely manner.

Comment: Instances of voids taking longer to re-let affected rent loss. Reports to Performance Scrutiny Committee summarised reasons for changes in performance figures.

Question: Average re-let time of voids in calendar days for all dwellings excluding major works was not meeting targets set and deteriorating. Did the target need lowering to make it achievable?

Response by Chair: As members we did not set the targets, they were set by officers in consultation with Lincoln Tenant's Panel. However, we wanted them to remain at the same level but improve and it was hoped this would happen.

Officer Response: Delays getting access to void properties could be caused by utility companies having work to carry out first, or tenants having passed on with access delays related to probate/legal reasons. We were trying to maximise the number of properties made available for tenants to move into balanced against housing needs. Transfers were increasing, which resulted in further voids, however, we were moving people into suitable housing for their needs which was good. Sometimes, two to three transfers were achieved out of one void property. There had been an unusually large number of tenancies ended this quarter with 40 sets of keys being handed back in one week. A financial balancing act was required between properties remaining void longer which incurred rental loss, against employment of experienced sub-contractors at extra cost to achieve quicker results.

Question: Why were so many tenancies being ended?

Response: More properties were being brought into stock and there had been an increase in transfers to deal with overcrowding/adaptation needs. We were still in the upper quartile for re-let of housing properties compared with elsewhere in the country and therefore still performing well. These were positive reasons why

tenancies had ended. Less than 1% out of our 7,800 housing stock was void at the current time.

Question: When would the Authority know how many Right to Buy transactions would be processed and how was the loss of these properties going to be recouped?

Response: There had been 90 applications received in the last four weeks. The Housing Revenue Account 30-year business plan proposed to increase its housing stock by 50 additional properties each year. There would hopefully be less losses due to voids moving forward over the next ten years as the short-term deficit ironed out.

Question: What was the maximum amount of discount permitted for Right to Buy transactions?

Response: This sum was £24,000. A consultation period was currently ongoing as to whether new properties should be excluded from the scheme.

Question: What type of properties were popular for Right to Buy applications?

Response: There was a variety of preference across the board.

Question Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenant's Panel: Was it possible to receive a breakdown on the types of property that were purchased through Right to Buy?

Response: Yes, officers would circulate this information separately to members of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

Comment by Officers: The following link informed members of the summary wording by the Government in relation to Right to Buy: [Right to Buy: summary booklet - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/right-to-buy-booklet)

RESOLVED that:

1. Further information be provided to members as requested above.
2. The current performance outcomes during Quarter 2 of the financial year 2024/25 to date, be noted.

39. **Financial Performance Quarterly Monitoring**

Adam Oxley, Principal Finance Business Partner:

a) presented a report to Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee with a summary of the second quarter's performance (up to 30 September 2024), on the Council's:

- Housing Revenue Account
- Housing Repairs Service
- Housing Investment Programme

b) provided information on the Council's:

- **Housing Revenue Account** — For 2024/25 the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) net revenue budget was set with a planned contribution from balances of £101,220, resulting in estimated general balances at year-end of £1,030,024, after allowing for the 2023/24 outturn position. The HRA was currently projecting a forecast underspend of £519,410, which would result in HRA balances of £1,549,435 as at the end of 2024/25 (Appendix A provided a forecast

Housing Revenue Account summary). Although the forecast position was an overspend there was a number of significant variations in income and expenditure. Full details of the main variances were provided at Appendix B.

- **Housing Repairs Service** – For 2024/25 the Council's Housing Repairs Service (HRS) net budget was set at zero, which reflected its full cost recovery nature. At quarter 2 the HRS were forecasting a deficit of £17,146 in 2024/25, an improvement of £338,165 since quarter 1, which had subsequently been repatriated to the HRA. Full details of the main variances were provided at Appendix C.
- **Housing Investment Programme** – The revised programme for 2024/25 amounted to £17.650m following the Quarter 1 position. At quarter 2 the programme had been decreased by £0,219m to £17.432m as shown at paragraph 7.2 of the report. The overall expenditure on the Housing Investment Programme at the end of quarter 2 was £5.730m, which was 32.87% of the 2024/25 revised programme. This excluded expenditure relating to Western Growth Corridor, which was currently shown on the General Investment Programme (GIP), to be apportioned at year end (current forecast outturn £1.3m) as detailed at Appendix J of the report. A further £1,091m had been spent as at the end of October 2024, although this was still a low percentage of expenditure at this stage of the financial year, works had been constrained by the availability of contractors and materials, however, new contracts were in place and spend expected to increase by the end of the financial year.

c) invited members questions and comments.

Members of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee considered the content of the report in further detail, asked questions and received relevant responses from officers as follows:

Question: Were the wider site costs for the Western Growth Corridor approved at Executive on 22 July 2024 funded through the Housing Revenue Account (HRA)?

Response: Yes. This was correct. The HRA owned 79% of Western Growth Corridor land.

Question: How many tenants were on the waiting list for aids and adaptations, which had increased substantially over the last two years?

Response: The budget came from the capital programme. Officers would investigate further and report back to members in due course.

Comment: Developers might wish to take account of the opportunity for new tenants to qualify for help with aids and adaptations on completion of their build.

Response: Aids and adaptations were included within our technical specifications for new builds.

Question: New builds were classified as houses for life?

Response: Yes, together with adaptations.

Councillor Alan Briggs complemented officers on their achievements to bring about a reduction in void loss garage rental income.

RESOLVED that:

1. Further information be provided to members as requested above.
2. The financial performance for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024 be noted with thanks.

40. Acquisition, Disposal and Land Use Strategy Update

Michelle Hoyles, Housing Strategy Manager:

- a) presented a report to update Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the Directorate of Housing and Investment's progress on development of a proposed Acquisition, Disposal and Land Use Strategy
- b) shared with the Sub-Committee a 2-page summary, which set out the proposed content and direction for the strategy, in order that feedback from the Sub-Committee could be incorporated into strategy development
- c) invited members of Lincoln Tenant's Panel the opportunity to comment on the contents of the report at this meeting
- d) reported that the Council had a duty as a social housing landlord to demonstrate that its Housing Revenue Account (HRA) delivered value for money to its tenants
- e) described the Council's HRA, as one of the city's largest landowners; therefore, how it monitored its land and property assets had a significant impact on both the financial sustainability of the HRA, and the quality of our neighbourhoods
- f) explained that the proposed strategy would bridge the gap between these policies and the overarching Housing Revenue Account Business Plan by incorporating how the Council would repurpose under-utilised land in this strategy, it would also enable the Council to fully progress its plans to make better use of sites such as garages and other land types that could be redeveloped, or undergo other investment for the benefit of tenants and the HRA
- g) invited members comments on the summary of the proposed content for the forthcoming strategy as detailed at Appendix A to the officers report.

Members welcomed early consultation and involvement in the Acquisitions, Disposals and Land Use Strategy.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be received and noted.

41. Asset Disposal Policy Update

Michelle Hoyles, Housing Strategy Manager:

- a. provided an update to Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on the Directorate of Housing and Investment's progress on development of its Asset Disposal Policy, which sat underneath the strategy discussed within the previous agenda item

- b. shared with the Sub-Committee an extract from the current draft policy, at Appendix A, which listed the proposed considerations the Council would take into account when deciding whether to dispose of an HRA property asset
- c. advised that Lincoln Tenant's Panel had been consulted on this report and would be involved in greater depth, prior to the full Disposals Policy being presented to the Sub-Committee in early 2025
- d. reported that the Council's HRA was one of the city's largest landowners, and its primary landlord, would from time to time need to consider disposing of land and property in its ownership
- e. advised that to ensure disposals were considered and enacted consistently and in the best interests of tenants, the service was developing an Asset Disposal Policy, a draft policy was almost complete and would shortly undergo consultation, prior to referral to the Sub-Committee in early 2025
- f. reported that a key section of the policy, which proposed the considerations the Council would take account of when deciding whether to dispose of an asset was ready for circulation at this stage, and officers were seeking feedback from the Sub-Committee on this extract to inform the final draft of the policy
- g. highlighted that Appendix A consolidated and clarified the approach the Council already took to asset disposal, which was robust and supported the making of sound decisions about land in HRA ownership; having an Asset Disposal Policy enabled the Council to better demonstrate these decisions were consistent as well as robust, by providing a published framework for decision making
- h. welcomed members feedback on the content of the report.

Members discussed the report in further detail, commented, asked questions and received relevant responses from officers as follows:

Comment: Members of Lincoln Tenants Panel were looking forward to being involved in this piece of work next year, which was progressing well.

Question: Within the General Fund Account temporary accommodation had to be provided under a statutory obligation to pay for suitable accommodation for homeless people, although the full cost was not totally covered by Government contributions. Were we any further forward with dealing with this problem?

Response: The Housing Authority were actively looking at opportunities to renovate existing buildings and also use modular construction types (pod format). We were also looking at leasing opportunities with other housing providers to minimise cost and maximise the needs of households. The long-term solution was to provide people with a permanent home. This was not a quick process which needed to flow through longer-term housing solutions.

Question: Was it possible for plots of land across the city used for student accommodation to be used as temporary housing needs moving forward?

Response: We could make use of surplus student accommodation; however, it was not always suitable for families due to it having shared studio facilities.

RESOLVED that the content of the report be received and noted with further consultation welcomed in due course.

42. Downsizing Policy Update

Paula Burton, Assistant Director, Housing Management, provided a verbal update on the Draft Downsizing Policy, which covered the following main points:

- The Downsizing Pilot Scheme finished in June this year.
- Nine applications were received.
- Five applications had been approved.
- Two tenants had already moved homes.
- One move had been rescinded due to the condition of the property/tenancy issues.
- Another two had been approved but suitable accommodation was still being sought.
- Although two of the approved cases had still to either find a suitable property, or move to one, they had been offered the maximum amount of £18,500 that would be spent from the budget of £80,000.
- Of the cases approved, approximately. £6,500 would be used to clear arrears and other housing related debts.
- The amount of £61,500 remaining from the original budget allocation would support more tenants (beyond those originally identified as in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to move to a more suitable, manageable and affordable home, release more larger properties to relieve homelessness and clear significant arrears and other housing debts.
- The next steps for the Lincoln Tenant's Panel would be to have further meetings with officers involved in the process and co-produce an updated policy if the recommendation was for it to continue.
- The written version of the Downsizing Update report would be circulated to members via Democratic Services.

Members discussed and offered comments on the content of the verbal update as follows:

Comment: It was pleasing to hear that progress was being made, although regrettable that many households were not utilising or in need of the larger properties which they were living in. Lincoln Tenant's Panel was looking forward to working with officers to encourage tenants to downsize properties if this was the best option for them moving forward.

Question: Did we notify those tenants on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) that they were able to downsize and how long were the payments likely to continue?

Response: We already notified tenants in receipt of DHP. An invite would be extended to Martin Walmsley, Assistant Director, Shared Revenues and Benefits, who was responsible for administration of the payment to report into the next meeting with an update on the current scheme.

RESOLVED that:

1. The written version of the Downsizing Update report be circulated to members of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee via Democratic Services.

2. Martin Walmsley, Assistant Director, Shared Revenues and Benefits be invited to attend and report into Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on 6 February 2025 with an update on the Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme.
3. The content of the verbal update be noted with thanks.

43. Work Programme 2024/25

The Senior Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the work programme for Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee for 2024/25 as detailed at Appendix A of the report
- b. highlighted that the work programme could be further populated in accordance with Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committees requests for topics of discussion and areas of preferred scrutiny to be used as a working document, added to or amended at members discretion at any time during the 2024/25 Municipal Year
- c. confirmed that the work programme included those areas for scrutiny linked to the strategic priorities of the Council and themed housing matters, to ensure that the work of the committee was relevant and proportionate.

Mick Barber, Chair of Lincoln Tenant's Panel requested a wider review be conducted on estate inspections to cover issues such as fly tipping, accountability, Anti-Social Behaviour and wider area issues rather than just the condition of people's gardens and communal areas etc.

The Chair suggested that this topic area be included as an item for consideration at the next meeting of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee to be held on 6 February 2025.

Officers agreed that a review of estate inspections was welcomed in this timely fashion as a place shaping initiative.

RESOLVED that the content of the Work Programme for 2024/25 be noted, subject to the following additional items to be included on the agenda for Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee to be held on 6 February 2025:

- An update on Discretionary Housing Payments (Martin Walmsley)
- A wider estate inspections review.

Lincoln Tenants Panel (LTP) Project Update

LTP continue to work with tenancy services, fire safety assurance, maintenance, business management and resident involvement on a variety of projects and hold monthly meetings, weekly void Inspections, quarterly complaints and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) complaint reviews, and created additional working groups focusing on tenancy service – gardens, ASB and tenancy sustainment.

Mick Barber continues to attend Social Housing Quality Network Panel and ARCH committee meetings. All members of LTP continue to attend training and seminars hosted by Four Million Homes and engaged with Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) national involvement week:

LTP are working with the Resident Involvement Team to co-create a digital newsletter/magazine – HOME covering important updates, how to stay connected in communities, tips and advice , updates from Lincoln Tenants Panel (LTP) and more. The newsletter is due to be launched in February.

Thank you.

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SUBJECT:	COUNCIL DWELLING AND GARAGE RENTS 2025-26
DIRECTORATE:	HOUSING AND INVESTMENT
REPORT AUTHOR:	JORDAN ALLMOND, HOUSING BUSINESS SUPPORT MANAGER

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To propose an increase to Council rents of 2.7% for dwellings, within the terms of the Government's rent policy for social housing, and 3% for garages, respectively; and to seek approval for the introduction of revised rents from Monday 7 April 2025.

2. Lincoln Tenants Panel (LTP) Consultation

- 2.1 LTP were consulted on the proposed increase to rents for the 2025-26 financial year, at their meeting on 7 January 2025.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 Having considered the impact on tenants and financial pressures the Council has in delivering services, the Council proposed to apply a rental increase of 2.7% to dwellings and 3% for garages for 2025-26 financial year. This was approved by Executive at their meeting on 20 January 2025.

The proposed levels of rent for 2025/26 will come into effect from Monday 7 April 2024. Budgeted rental income for the year will be circa £36,371,680.

The average 52-week net rent for Council dwellings will increase by £2.36 per week, across all property and rent types, under the proposed 2.7% increase.

The average 52-week rent for Council garages will increase by £0.27 per week under the proposed 3% increase.

4. Background

4.1 Social Rent Setting

The national Rent Convergence Policy and Social Rent Guidance was introduced in April 2002, the aim of which was for those rents in the social housing sector (local authority rents and those charged by housing associations) should be brought onto a common system based on a formula set by Government. The formula creates a "formula rent" for each individual property which is calculated based on:

- The relative value of the property;
- Relative local income levels; and
- The size of the property.

The formula rent is often also referred to as the “target rent” and is the maximum allowable rent the Council can charge on a social rent property. The City Council and other social landlords are expected to move the actual rent of a property (which may be different to formula/target rent) to the formula rent over time when a property becomes available for re-let.

As at week commencing 2 December 2024, there were 7,348 properties let on a social rent.

4.2 Affordable Rents Setting

Affordable rents were introduced nationally in 2011 to provide an intermediary level of rent within the social housing sector. They apply to new build and buy back properties. Affordable rents do not follow the same structure and limitations as target rents above, instead their rents are based on a maximum of 80% of the market rent, would that property have been on the open market. Upon becoming void, affordable rent properties must be revalued under Government Rent Policy and their rent set at no more than 80% of the open market rent, and no lower than the comparable target rent for that property, would it have had a social rent. As affordable rent properties are revalued when they become void, average rents fluctuate throughout the year dependent upon the private rented sector. As at week commencing 2 December 2024, there were 441 properties let on an affordable rent.

4.3 Garage Rents

Garage rents are managed as part of the annual fees and charges process. Rent structuring and annual increases are not subject to the Government Rent Standard.

4.4 Limit on Annual Rent Increases

Annual increases to housing rents are capped at CPI + 1% per annum for dwelling rents. The CPI figure used is from September of the year prior to the annual increase, with September 2024 being the applicable CPI figure for rent setting for 2025-26.

CPI in September 2024 was 1.7%. Therefore, the maximum housing rents can be increased in 2025-26 is 2.7%.

4.5 Self-Financing and Regulation

Members will be aware that the financing for Council housing was changed in April 2012 – the ‘Self-Financing Regime’ was introduced under which local authorities were required to buy themselves out of the national housing subsidy regime in return for the keeping of future rental income at local level. The valuation of the housing stock and the Council’s Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan was based on rental income rising in line with the Government’s rent convergence policy and rent guidelines.

The Council’s ability to charge rents is governed by the Rent Standard, which is one of the economic standards that the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) expects providers of social housing to comply with. It sets the requirements around how

registered providers set and increase rents for social housing in line with Government policy as set out in Policy Statement on Rents for Social Housing as detailed in 4.1, 4.2 and 4.4 of this report.

The Council has taken a considered approach regarding rental increases to tenants and their households within the last few years, balanced against our need to be financially sustainable and to continue to deliver services. In 2022/2023 a lower increase was approved at 3.6% (compared to a 4.1% maximum) and in 2023/2024 at 6.5% (compared to a 7% maximum) respectively. As the below table demonstrates:

Year	Total limit	COLC Rental increase	Commentary
2020-21	2.7%	2.7%	
2021-22	1.5%	1.5%	
2022-23	4.1%	3.6%	
2023-24	7.0%	6.5%	
2024-25	7.7%	7.7%	7% cap legislated by Government for 2023-24 for current rents, but not target rents which continued to inflate at 11.1%
2025-26	2.7%	2.7%	

4.6 As at week commencing 2 December 2024 the proportion of our tenants in receipt either Housing Benefit (full or partial) or Universal Credit was:

- 19% (23% previously reported) were in receipt of full housing benefit payment.
- 7% (9% previously reported) were in receipt of partial housing benefit payment.
- 49% (41% previously reported) were in receipt of Universal Credit.
- 25% (27% previously reported) did not receive any of the above.

5. 2025-26 Average Rents

5.1 Social Rents

There were a total of 7348 properties that are charged at social rent as at week commencing 2 December 2024. The below table shows the average increase per property:

Property Type	Average Increase per week (52 wk.)	Proposed Average Rent (52 wk.)	Number of Properties
1 bed	£2.08	£79	3024
2 bed	£2.32	£88.34	2613
3 bed	£2.56	£97.53	1584
4 bed	£2.73	£103.85	115
5 bed	£2.84	£108.05	4
6+ bed	£3.15	£119.67	8

5.2 Affordable Rents

There were a total of 441 properties that are charged at affordable rent as at week commencing 2 December 2024. The below table shows the average increase per property:

Property Type	Average Increase per week (52 wk.)	Proposed Average Rent (52 wk.)	Number of Properties
1 bed	£3.38	£128.55	115
2 bed	£3.59	£136.79	166
3 bed	£3.87	£147.42	124
4 bed	£4.41	£167.64	35
5 bed	£6.18	£234.83	1
6+ bed			None

5.3 Garages

An increase in garage rents of 3% was proposed in line with the Authority's general Fees and Charges increase. The result in an average increase in the rent charged to £9.27 per week for 2025/26 (based on a calculated 52-week charge period), an increase of £0.27 per week.

A review of garage provision is ongoing, and we are committed to a fundamental revaluation of the garage rent structure as part of the wider garage strategy.

6. Strategic Priorities

6.1 Let's reduce all kinds of inequality

Council house rents remain significantly lower than the rent levels in the private rented sector in the city.

6.2 Let's deliver quality housing

The rent levels for 2025/26 recognises the need for a stable financial environment to support the delivery of new homes and increase resources available to maintain existing stock. The Council's 30-year Housing Business Plan commits the Council to improving our existing housing stock, reduce carbon emissions, build more homes, and improve the environment of estates.

7. Organisational Impacts

7.1 Finance (including whole life costs where applicable)

The proposed rent levels will have the below impact on the current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS):

Approved Budget for Rent 2024/25 - £35,213,060
Current MTFS Budget for 2025/26 - £36,153,200
Current MTFS Budget for 2026/27 - £37,081,760
Current MTFS Budget for 2027/28 - £38,033,480
Current MTFS Budget for 2028/29 - £39,008,940
Proposed Budget for 2025/26 - £36,371,680
Proposed Budget for 2026/27 - £37,396,020
Proposed Budget for 2027/28 - £38,583,470
Proposed Budget for 2028/29 - £39,586,430
Proposed Budget for 2029/30 - £40,729,200

Proposed Budget for 2025/26 - £36,371,680 sees additional income of £1,158,620 against Approved Budget for Rent 2024/25.

Proposed Budgets for 2025/26 – 2028/29 (£151,937,600) would see additional income of £1,660,220 against the Current MTFS Budgets for this period (£150,277,380). This is due to several factors including increase of 2025/26 opening stock numbers, lower forecast Right To Buy sales from 2026/27-2028/29, inclusion of additional day in calculations.

There is no Current MTFS Budget for 2029/30 to compare to as the previous MTFS was set for 2024/25 – 2028/29.

The MTFS and the HRA 30-year Business Plan assumes a rent level increase of RPI + 1% each year in line with rent formula. In the budget planning for 2025/26 an assumption had been made that RPI would decrease, but to a lower level of 3%, a difference of -0.3%. The loss of income associated with this change is circa £105k in 2025/26 and circa £5m across the life of the 30 Year Business Plan (BP). This also assumes a certain level of additions to stock and reductions through the Right to Buy regime.

Note: A zero % increase would reduce yearly rental income by £1.048m in 2025/26 and take approx. £47m out of the HRA Business Plan over the 30-year period.

7.2 Legal Implications including Procurement Rules

7.3 There are no legal or procurement implications arising from this report.

Equality, Diversity and Human Rights

The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

7.4 Human Resources

None.

7.5 Land, Property and Accommodation

None.

7.6 Significant Community Impact &/or Environmental Impact

None.

7.7 Corporate Health and Safety implications

None.

8. Risk Implications

8.1 (i) Options Explored

- To increase dwelling rents by 2.7%, and garages rents by 3%, respectively. Including the impact this would have on the forecasting of Housing Revenue Account and 30-year business plan.
- To Increase dwelling rents by 3% in 2025-26, as previously assumed in MTFS. However, this is not possible due to the cap of 2.7% that has been applied to rent increases.

8.2 (ii) Key Risks Associated with the Preferred Approach

There are no risks associated with the preferred approach.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 That Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee note the content of the report and agreed rent levels for Council Dwelling and Garages for the financial year 2025-26. With the revised rents levels coming into effect from Monday 7 April 2025.

Is this a key decision?

No

Do the exempt information categories apply?

No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?

No

How many appendices does the report contain?

None

List of Background Papers:

None

Lead Officer:

Jordan Allmond, Housing Business Support Manager
Email address: Jordan.Allmond@Lincoln.gov.uk

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SUBJECT:	DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS UPDATE
DIRECTORATE:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK
REPORT AUTHOR:	MARTIN WALMSLEY, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR SHARED REVENUES AND BENEFITS

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee with information in relation to the Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme.

2. Lincoln Tenants Panel Consultation

- 2.1 LTP was consulted regarding the draft report, - responses have been forwarded to the Resident Involvement Manager, and have been incorporated within this report.

3. Background

- 3.1 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) are available to local authorities to assist customers who need additional help with their housing costs. A Central Government grant is awarded each year, specified to individual local authorities based on historical spend/ anticipated need. However, local authorities can choose to pay above the level of Government grant up to another figure known as the 'Permitted Total' – but any expenditure above the Government grant is borne by the local authority.
- 3.2 DHP is completely separate from the statutory Housing Benefit (HB) scheme apart from the fact that HB must be in payment and the weekly DHP amount awarded must not exceed the maximum HB that could be awarded in each case – for example, not above the level of rent charged (less ineligible services which do not attract HB). Since Universal Credit (UC) has also been introduced in recent years, DHP can also be used to 'top up' the housing component of UC. DHP can, and is, also used for rent deposits and rent in advance, for appropriate cases.
- 3.3 A joint DHP Policy was agreed for the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service between City of Lincoln Council and North Kesteven District Council in early 2013, to ensure consistency of decision-making and robust criteria to take account of impacts of welfare reforms. Behind the approved policy were guidance/ procedural notes for decision-makers, which retained flexibility for the service to make changes to take account of changes in legislation, guidance and demands. This DHP Policy was further reviewed in 2015 and approved by Executive, to take into account 'conditionality' as part of the policy for appropriate cases – to try and reduce the long-term reliance on DHP for some customers.

'Conditionality' is similar to the 'claimant commitment' in place for certain benefits under Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Essentially the DHP applicant has to be undertaking certain actions in order to receive (and continue receiving) DHP, trying to make efforts (where possible, and appropriate) to change their financial

situation – e.g. engage with a provider of personal budgeting support, seek a lower rental property, etc.

Introducing ‘conditionality’ has been very effective. Officers have seen a decrease in long-term reliance on DHP as it has helped encourage tenants to look at things like moving to more affordable accommodation and getting help with managing their budget. This has meant officers are able to provide DHP assistance to other customers to sustain their tenancies where there is not an option for them to move to more affordable accommodation.

The joint policy with North Kesteven District Council allows consistency between the two local authorities, especially as it has been identified that many customers move between the two authorities which means they are receiving consistent DHP decision making.

- 3.4 Behind the DHP Policy is a set of procedures and guidelines for decision-makers from the Revenues and Benefits Shared Service. These guidelines are reviewed each year in light of available Government grant as well as any changing priorities but do not fundamentally change the principles of the actual policy. It is important to note that although a DHP Policy should be in place and procedures behind this, the scheme by its very name is ‘discretionary’ and whilst each application is looked at in line with guidance – it is also considered on its own individual merits.

4. Discretionary Housing Payments – City of Lincoln Council

- 4.1 The table below shows City of Lincoln Council’s DHP grant allocations from Central Government, from 2012/13 through to the upcoming financial year 2025/26.

Financial Year	City of Lincoln Council Central Government DHP Grant
2025/26	£132,330
2024/25	£132,330
2023/24	£132,330
2022/23	£132,330
2021/22	£186,707
2020/21	£250,113
2019/20	£178,674
2018/19	£208,624
2017/18	£242,505
2016/17	£173,675
2015/16	£139,678
2014/15	£194,308
2013/14	£199,741
2012/13	£98,865

The table demonstrates a significant increase in DHP grant for the financial years from 2016/17 to 2021/22 (inclusive), - to try and assist with mitigating welfare reforms introduced. However, the grants have since been reduced and ‘static’ since April 2022. With Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates being ‘frozen’ for most recent financial

years (other than 2024/25) and with rents rising – effectively there is ‘less’ available in DHP to allocate, in real terms.

5. DHP 2024/25 – Key Statistics

5.1 Up to the end of quarter 3 2024/25, DHP has been allocated as follows:

Total Government Contribution for 2024/2025	£132,330.00
Net Paid (to 31.12.24)	£74,052.00
Total Committed (to 31.3.25)	£24,724.00
Total Spend	£98,777.00

In terms of the number of applications received and awards made:

	Housing Benefit (HB) only	Universal Credit (UC) only	Total
Number of Applications	54	339	393
Number of Awards	21	141	162
Number of Refusals	33	198	231

The following table shows how many awards are ongoing awards and how many are ‘one-off’ DHP awards (e.g. for a rent deposit): The £22,824 spent on rent deposits/rent in advances has been paid to help customers move out of either supported accommodation, temporary accommodation or to help the customer secure more affordable accommodation.

	Number of Awards	Expenditure (£)
Number of and expenditure on ongoing awards for example, weekly or monthly awards.	127	£75,953.00
Number of and expenditure on one-off awards	35	£22,824.00

In terms of ongoing awards and tenure type:

	HB Customer	UC Customer	Total
Number of ongoing awards where the customer is a Council tenant	6	33	39
Number of ongoing awards where the customer is renting from a private tenant or a social registered landlord	0	88	88
			127

	0 - 6 months	6 - 12 months	12 - 18 months	18-24 months	24 - 30 months	30 months +
Number of Awards	27	57	20	8	6	9

This table shows the key reasons for DHP expenditure:

Expenditure by Reason for Award	Benefit Cap	Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy	Local Housing Allowance Reform	Other (Non-Welfare Reform)	
To help secure and move to alternative accommodation (for example, rent deposit)			£6,870.00	£15,954.00	
To help with short term rental costs while the claimant secures and moves to alternative accommodation		£4,386.00	£7,263.00		
To help with short term rental costs while the claimant seeks employment	£510.00	£324.00	£4,020.00		
To help with on-going rental costs for any other reason	£480.00	£10,526.00	£43,784.00	£4,660.00	
Total	£990.00	£15,236.00	£61,937.00	£20,614.00	£98,777.00

There has been a reduction in the number of DHP awards made to City of Lincoln Council Tenants since including Disability Living Allowance (DLA) /Personal Independence Payment (PIP) /Attendance Allowance (AA) as income within the income and expenditure calculation to assess DHP awards, which in turn has allowed officers to increase the amounts awarded to those in the private sector. This has helped to largely keep spend within the Government grant allocated.

6. Downsizing and DHPs

- 6.1 The following examples demonstrate the link between downsizing and the DHP scheme:

Example 1 – Customer living in a 3-bedroom property. Children left the property in May 2023 which resulted in the customer being affected by the 25% spare room subsidy ('bedroom tax'). The customer had been relying on a DHP award ever since. The customer was approved for the Downsizing scheme in April 2024, so it was

agreed that the full shortfall would be paid by DHP until the customer was moved, to prevent any further arrears. Customer moved to a 1-bed property in September 2024.

Example 2 – Customer and non-dependent living in a 3-bed property, - both extremely vulnerable. The customer had been relying on a DHP award since 2018 to help cover the 14% spare room subsidy ('bedroom tax'). Non-dependent moved out February 2024 to a warden controlled flat, - customer now affected by the 25% 'bedroom tax'. The customer was approved for the Downsizing scheme in March 2024, so it was agreed that the full shortfall would be paid by DHP until the customer was moved, to prevent any further arrears. Customer moved to a 1-bedroom property in June 2024.

***Future reports will refer to 'downsizing' as 'right sizing.'**

6.2 Some further points regarding how DHP is utilised at City of Lincoln Council:

- Reduced awards are made where the customer has previously received a DHP. A DHP is normally turned down where 'conditionality' has not been met. When the Downsizing Incentive Scheme was originally introduced on a trial basis, all City of Lincoln Council tenants receiving a DHP due to 'bedroom tax' were written to, advising them of the scheme, removing any DHP awards where the customer was not willing to use the scheme.
- DHP decision-makers are keen to encourage DHP applicants/recipients to sign-up to the Downsizing Incentive Scheme.
- If a customer is refusing to downsize, then consideration will be given on an individual case basis whether or not it is appropriate to support them through a DHP award.

***Future reports will refer to 'downsizing' as 'right sizing.'**

7. Strategic Priorities

7.1 Let's reduce all kinds of inequality

Effective usage of the DHP scheme can help customers meet their housing costs, normally on a limited/ short-term basis.

7.2 Future reports will refer to 'downsizing' as 'right sizing'

8. Organisational Impacts

8.1 Finance

A Central Government grant for DHP is awarded each year, specified to individual local authorities based on historical spend/ anticipated need. Local authorities can choose to pay above the level of Government grant up to another figure known as the 'Permitted Total' – but any expenditure above the Government grant is borne by the local authority.

8.2 Legal Implications

The Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001 (as amended) provide legislative and procedural rules and guidance relating to Discretionary Housing Payments.

8.3 Equality, Diversity and Human Rights:

The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken and provided alongside the DHP Policy approved by Executive.

9. Risk Implications

- 9.1 A robust DHP Policy and associated procedures help to mitigate risks relating to administration of the scheme, which could relate to DHP grant being over/underutilised, or inequality within the approach to decision-making.

10. Recommendation

- 10.1 That Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee reviews and comments on the content of this report and the information contained therein.

Is this a key decision? No

Do the exempt information categories apply? No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? No

How many appendices does the report contain? None

List of Background Papers: None

Lead Officer: Martin Walmsley, Assistant Director Shared Revenues and Benefits
Email address: martin.walmsley@lincoln.gov.uk

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SUBJECT:	ESTATE INSPECTIONS REVIEW
DIRECTORATE:	HOUSING AND INVESTMENT
REPORT AUTHOR:	MARIANNE UPTON – TENANCY SERVICES MANAGER

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Chair of the Lincoln Tenants Panel requested an update on the wider review of Estate Inspections at the Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting on 25 November 2024.

2. Lincoln Tenants Panel (LTP) Consultation

- 2.1 LTP have been and are currently involved in this area of work. Five members of LTP attended the Estate Inspections this year.

The LTP working group has been meeting to review the issues raised on the 2024 Estate Inspections and to consider if the current process is delivering the outcomes that tenants want.

The next meeting is booked for 14 February 2025 and the group have asked the Tenancy Services Manager to consider and feedback on four strands of work. The Tenants Panel Chair will update Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee on this workstream during future Lincoln Tenants Panel Project Updates as part of the committee's standard agenda.

3. Background

- 3.1 There have been problems in the past with reporting back on the progress made to rectify problems identified during the annual Estate Inspections and the progress of requests for improvements. LTP requested that the processes be reviewed to see if the management of the information and the outcomes for tenants could be improved. This request has also been supported by the Members of Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

4. The Group's Four Work Strands

- 4.1 Review the current actions identified

The LTP working group would like to see an updated version of the spreadsheet showing the issues raised on the 2024 inspections that includes the status (e.g. in progress, completed, not completed, reasons why it is not completed and expected timescales).

Officers are currently checking the issues raised and updating the information on the spreadsheet. It will be formatted clearly so that progress can be easily seen.

4.2 Consider how we implement actions identified

This relates to how we approach the work and whether we look at a themed approach across the city by picking a particular issue to focus on, or using a more estate-focused approach by developing a programme that tackles issues for 1 or 2 estates/areas per year (for clarity this would be the improvement/enhancement works, rather than repairs which would continue to be rectified city-wide).

4.3 Exploring alternative options

The current Estate Inspection model has been in place for a number of years and needs assessing. LTP are supportive of exploring other options that may be less resource intensive, easy to monitor, cover areas that are not currently on the routes, and provide a more consistent, on-going management of estates rather than a snapshot once a year. Any alternative option would still enable Members and tenants to be involved.

4.4 2025 Estate Programme

The programme for this year now needs planning and more work needs to be completed on the review with LTP so that a decision can be made about whether this will be the same format as previously, or an amended format.

5. **Strategic Priorities**

5.1 **Let's deliver quality housing**

The appearance and maintenance of our estates has an impact on whether tenants feel they live in a quality home in a well-cared for environment.

5.2 **Let's enhance our remarkable place**

Our estates cover large areas throughout the city and when they are well kept & maintained they enhance the experience of living in, working in and visiting Lincoln.

6. **Organisational Impacts**

6.1 **Finance (including whole life costs where applicable)**

This report is for information only and has no financial impacts.

6.2 **Legal Implications including Procurement Rules**

This report is for information only and has no legal impacts.

6.3 **Equality, Diversity and Human Rights**

The Public Sector Equality Duty means that the Council must consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work, in shaping policy, delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

It requires that public bodies have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity
- Foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities

This report is for information only and has no equality, diversity or human rights impacts impacts.

7. Risk Implications

7.1 (i) Options Explored

This report has no risk implications.

7.2 (ii) Key Risks Associated with the Preferred Approach

N/A.

8. Recommendation

9.1 That the content of the report is noted.

9.2 That LTP continues to work with the Tenancy Services Manager to co-create a process that works effectively for the tenants and the Council.

Is this a key decision? No

Do the exempt information categories apply? No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? No

How many appendices does the report contain? 0

List of Background Papers: None

Lead Officer: Marianne Upton, Tenancy Services Manager
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SUBJECT: WORK PROGRAMME - 2024/25

DIRECTORATE: CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND TOWN CLERK

LEAD OFFICER: ALI HEWSON, SENIOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present Members with the draft work programme for 2024/25 (Appendix A).

2. Background

- 2.1 The draft work programme for 2024/25 has been agreed by the Chair and Vice/Chair of Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee and the Chair of Lincoln Tenant's Panel.
- 2.2 This work programme can be further populated in accordance with Housing Scrutiny Sub Committees requests for topics of discussion and areas of preferred scrutiny. It will be used as a working document and can be added to or amended at members discretion at any time during the 2024/25 Municipal Year.
- 2.3 The work programme includes those areas for scrutiny linked to the strategic priorities of the Council and themed housing matters, to ensure that the work of this committee is relevant and proportionate.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 That Members note the content of the work programme for 2024/25.

Is this a key decision? No

Do the exempt information categories apply? No

Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply? No

How many appendices does the report contain? One

List of Background Papers: None

Lead Officer: Alison Hewson,
Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Housing Scrutiny Sub Committee Work Programme – Timetable for 2024/25

12 June 2024

CANCELLED

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Item(s)	Responsible Person(s)	Origin of Request
Lincoln Tenants Panel Update	Mick Barber, Chair LTP	Regular report by MB
Quarter 4 (2023/24) – Performance Report	Michelle Hoyles	Regular Report
Quarter 4 (2023/24) Housing Finance Report	Laura Shipley/Adam Oxley	Regular Report
Policy Updates (TBC)	TBC	Reports as Required
Work Programme 2024/25	Ali Hewson	Regular Report

8 August 2024 – Core Landlord Services

Item(s)	Responsible Person(s)	Origin of Request
Lincoln Tenants Panel Update	Mick Barber, Chair of LTP	Reserved time for LTP topics
Quarter 4 (2023/24) – Performance Report	Michelle Hoyles	Regular Report
Tenant Satisfaction Measures Report	Michelle Hoyles & Denise Raine (Acuity)	Regular Report
Quarter 4 (2023/24) Housing Finance Report	Laura Shipley/Adam Oxley	Regular Report
Income Management and Arrears Policy	Marianne Upton	Policy review
Pets Policy	Marianne Upton	New policy
Neighbourhood Management Policy	Marianne Upton	New policy
Tenancy Services Structure Update	Marianne Upton	Update
Building Compliance Report	Martin Kerrigan	Compliance report
Work Programme 2024/25	Paula Burton	Regular Report

5 September 2024 – Core Landlord Services/Additional Housing

Item(s)	Responsible Person(s)	Origin of Request
Lincoln Tenants Panel Update	Mick Barber, Chair of LTP	Reserved time for LTP topics
Voids Cleansing - Cost Recovery	LTP	Mick Barber, Chair LTP
Quarter 1 (2024/25) – Performance Report inc ASB update	Michelle Hoyles	Regular Report ASB at request of LTP/Members
Quarter 1 (2024/25) Housing Finance Report	Laura Shipley/Adam Oxley	Regular Report
Housing Management Structure Updates	Paula Burton	Update
Downsizing Policy and Update	Marianne Upton	New policy
Briefing on Right to Buy and Section 106 Funds	Andrea Ripley	Requested by HSSC
Work Programme 2024/25	Paula Burton	Regular Report

Updated July 2024

31 October 2024 – Core Landlord Services/Estate Regeneration

Item(s)	Responsible Person(s)	Origin of Request
Lincoln Tenants Panel Update	Mick Barber, Chair of LTP	Reserved time for LTP topics
Reasons for performance down turn and targets being missed”, “action plans and activity to redress”	Jo Crookes, Customer Services Manager	Requested by members: HSSC 5 September 2024
Tenant Satisfaction Measures – Quarter 2 Performance	Michelle Hoyles	Regular Report
Anti-Social Behaviour Update	Marianne Upton/Ben Jackson	Update
Unacceptable Customer Actions Policy	Emily Holmes/Jo Crookes	New
Remedies Policy	Emily Holmes/Jo Crookes	New
Estate Inspections	Marianne Upton	Regular report
Estate Regeneration Investment Programme	Marianne Upton/Kevin Bowring	HRABP
Housing Management Structure Update	Paula Burton	Requested HSSC 5 Sept 2024 Verbal Update
Work Programme 2024/25	Paula Burton	Regular Report

25 November 2024 – Core Landlord Services

Item(s)	Responsible Person(s)	Origin of Request
Quarter 2 (2024/25) Performance Update inc ASB update	Michelle Hoyles	Regular Report ASB at request of LTP/Members
Quarter 2 (2024/25) Housing Finance Report	Laura Shipley/Adam Oxley	Regular Report
Acquisition, Disposal and Land Use Strategy Update	Andrea Ripley	New Strategy
Asset Disposal Policy Update	Andrea Ripley	New Strategy
Downsizing Policy Update	Paula Burton	Requested by Members HSSC 31 Oct 2024
Work Programme 2024/25	Paula Burton	Regular Report

6 February 2025 – Core Landlord Services/Decarbonisation

Item(s)	Responsible Person(s)	Origin of Request
Lincoln Tenants Panel Review Update Report	Mick Barber, Chair of LTP	Reserved time for LTP topics
Discretionary Housing Payments Update	Martin Walmsley	HSSC -25 Nov 2024
Tenancy Agreement Update	Marianne Upton	Policy Update
Wider Estate Inspection Review	Marianne Upton/Paula Burton	HSSC -25 Nov 2024 - M Barber, Chair LTP
Council Dwellings and Garage Rents 2025-26	Jordan Allmond	Regular report
Work Programme 2024/25	Paula Burton	Regular Report

17 March 2025

Item(s)	Responsible Person(s)	Origin of Request
Lincoln Tenants Panel Matters	Mick Barber, LTP	Regular Update
Quarter 3 (2024/25) – Performance Report-Inc ASB	Hazel Claridge	Regular Report Quarterly ASB at request of LTP/Members
Housing Scrutiny Sub-Committee Target Setting	Lara Wells/Emily Holmes	Annual Report
Quarter 3 (2024/25) Housing Finance Report	Laura Shipley/Adam Oxley	New Regular Quarterly Report
41 Building Compliance 6 monthly update (3 of 6 Key Areas)	Martin Kerrigan	HSSC – 8 August 2024
Setting of Performance Targets 2025/26	Daren Turner	Annual Review
Policy Updates (TBC)	TBC	Reports as Required
Report from PH Cllr Nannestad to Performance Scrutiny Committee	Cllr Nannestad	Annual Report
Work Programme 2025/26	Paula Burton	Regular Report

Other Agenda topics to be scheduled into 2025/26 as appropriate.

- Complaints
- Lincoln Standard
- Estate Regeneration Investment Programme 6 monthly update
- Allocations Policy Review Paula Burton Date TBC

Updated July 2024

- Tenancy Agreement -Marianne Upton Date TBC
- Caretaking Review - Marianne Upton, Amy Larder Date TBC